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To: Interested parties

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Trump-GOP tax cut integral to Democratic midterm message June national messaging web-survey

The Trump-GOP tax cut must be the centerpiece of any Democratic midterm message, in the same way that Obamacare was the foundation for the Republican wave in 2010. That is the clear conclusion of the third phase of research on the new tax cut and the economy from *Democracy Corps* and *AFT*.¹ This national web-survey finds the tax cut has become a more motivating election issue for its opponents than for its supporters. Moreover, the more Democratic messages emphasize the GOP's "tax scam for the rich" and *vow to raise taxes on the rich and corporations to fund investments*, the greater the opposition to the tax cut and the growth in the Democratic congressional margin and turnout advantage.

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The tax cut: Democrats' Obamacare opportunity

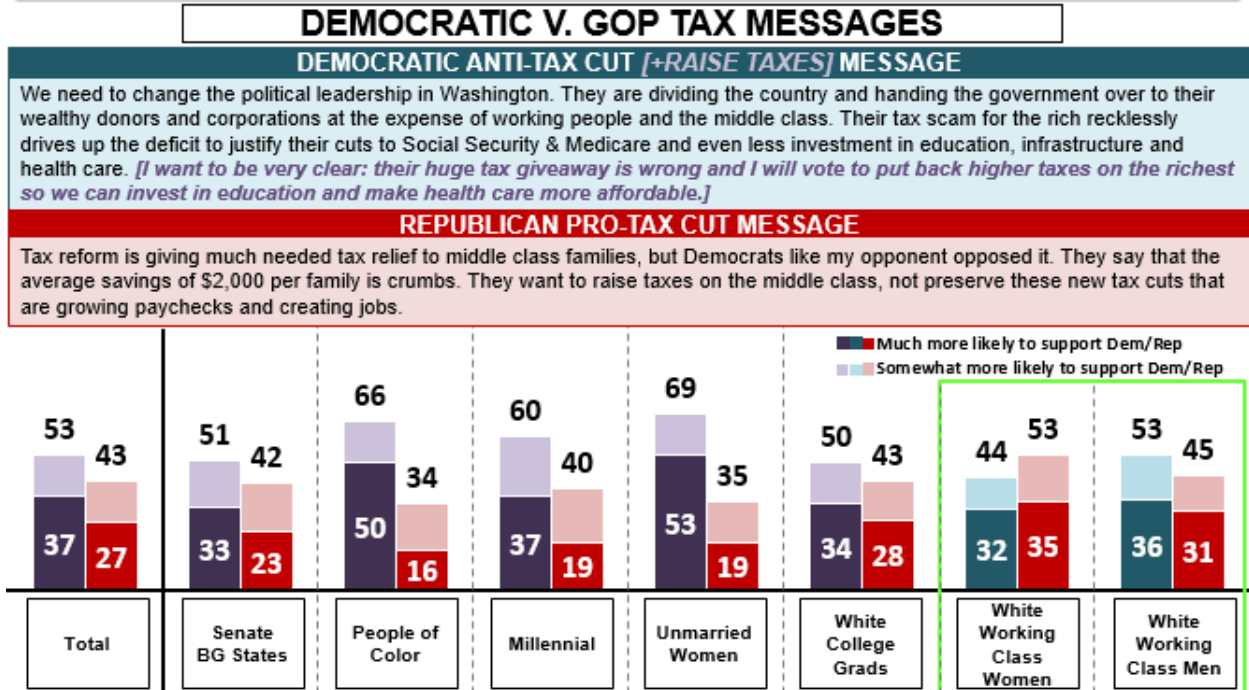
Opponents of the tax cut continue to worry that its hefty price tag threatens critical priorities, particularly Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid, and their concern that the rich reap most of the benefits of the tax cut has deepened since April. During that same period, the tax cut has become a more motivating midterm election issue for its opponents than for its supporters.

The tax cut law is very important to the votes of 37 percent of the its opponents, while less than one-third of its opponents say it is very important to their vote in November. The tax cut is especially significant to the votes of people of color, a critical progressive turnout target (37 percent very important).

¹ In partnership with the *American Federation of Teachers (AFT)*, *Democracy Corps* conducted a national web-survey from June 1-5, 2018 among 1,400 registered voters from a voter-file sample. The margin of error for the full sample is +/- 2.97 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level. Ideological measures were weighted to representative national phone surveys to offset the bias of web samples. This follows a national phone survey of 1,000 registered voters conducted March 25-April 2, 2018 and focus groups with white working class 'Obama-Trump' voters from Macomb County, African American women from Detroit, and White college graduate women from suburban Southfield on March 7-9, 2018.

This is not a messaging fight that Republicans can win. Republicans’ best argument for the tax cut is their least persuasive midterm message. Immigration is a much more potent midterm issue and Republicans’ top testing message condemns Sanctuary Cities and warns about the threat of MS-13. The anti-tax cut messages from Democrats, by contrast, test better and are more successful consolidating and motivating their target voters.

These are some things that Democrats/Republicans running for U.S. Congress and offices in (STATE) are saying. For each, please indicate whether you are much more likely, somewhat more likely, a little more likely, or no more likely to support the Democratic/Republican candidate who says that.



Branding: tax scam for the rich

The Democratic message on the tax cuts begins by attacking politicians who are dividing the country to cut corrupt deals for the rich.² This opening works for two reasons:

- First, it meets voters at their real starting point in the era of Trump. The extreme polarization and breakdown of norms in American public life and politics are the dominant concerns of voters across partisan and demographic divides.
- Second, it connects this division to an economy that produces tremendous benefits for the rich and corporations, but not the average American. These politicians set hardworking Americans against each other, then cut corrupt deals to benefit the rich at their expense.

² While the tax cut is the best possible example of the corrupt trickle-down governance of the current political leadership, this opening works for a broader message about a rigged economy and the burden of rising costs. Moreover, with Republicans in control of both Chambers of Congress, the White House and the majority of state houses and legislatures, this anti-incumbent, anti-politics, and anti-corruption opening for an economic message is available to all Democratic candidates and progressives.

“Tax scam for the rich” is the branding that captures that powerful entry point.

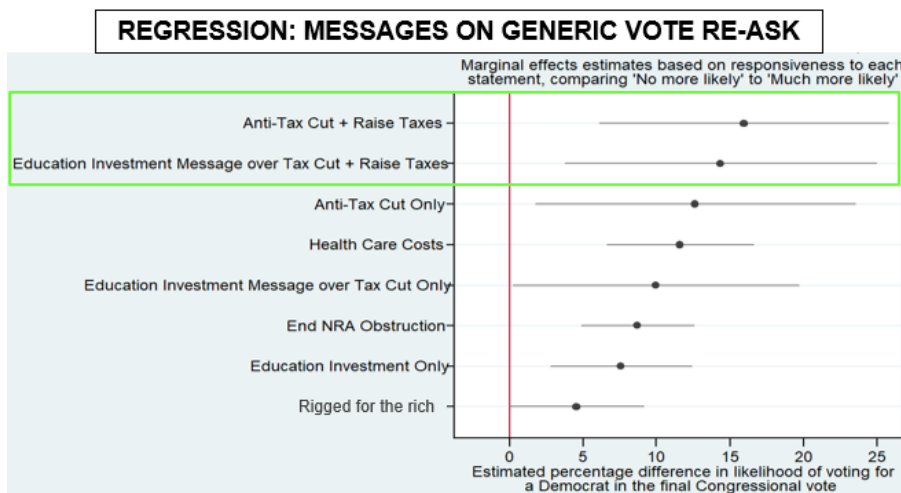
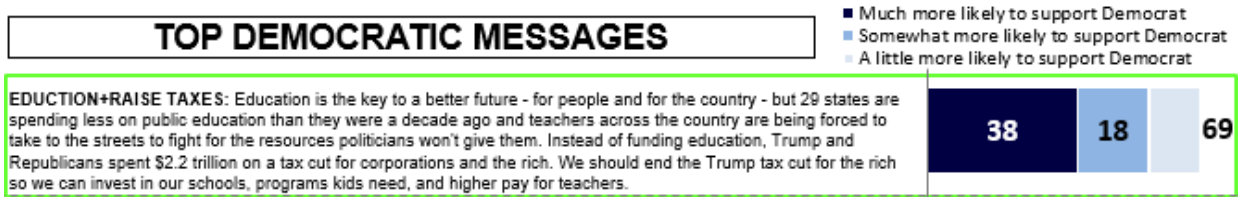
Investments over tax cuts

The winning tax message continues by defining the issue as a trade-off with investments in the priorities the middle class cares about most – Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and education – and builds to a call for greater investment, not less.

The top concern about the tax cut is its price tag, which threatens funding for investments. When presented with a list of facts from opponents of the tax law, voters were most likely to prioritize their concern about the law’s risk to Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid. Medicare and Social Security are the top priorities for investment across nearly every demographic as well.

Education is also a powerful part of the story. Education is the most important priority for investment in a forced choice among undecided voters (30 percent) and it is the top priority along with affordable health care among millennials (24 and 25 percent, respectively) who hold huge potential for Democrats, but are least likely to see the election as important or relevant to them.

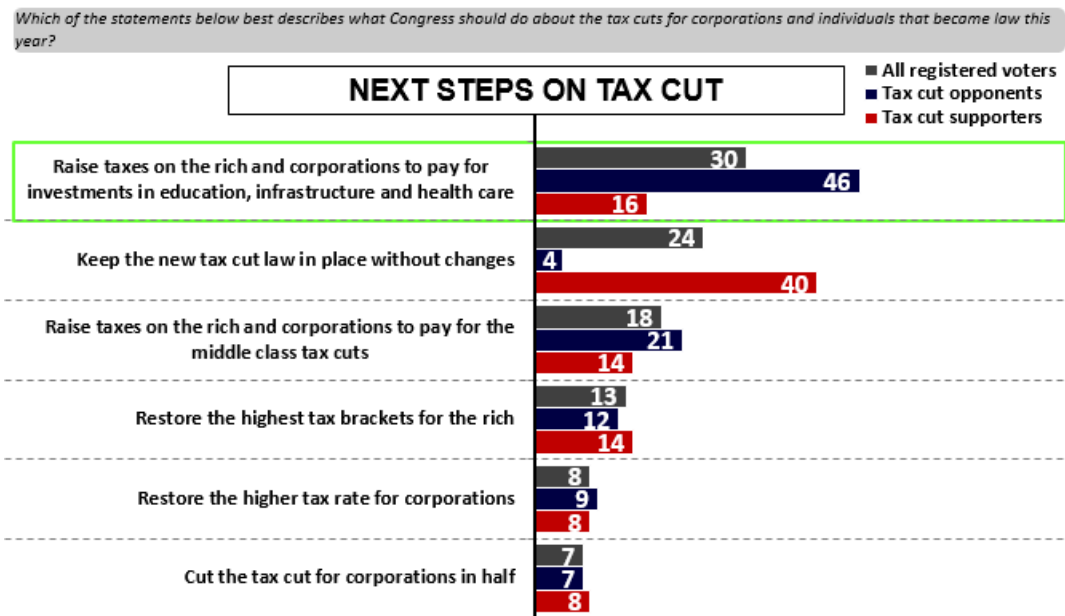
In fact, the single most popular message tested in this survey is a message that criticizes politicians for supporting the new tax cut, at a time when teachers are being forced to take to the street because of the ongoing underinvestment in education, and calls for raising taxes on the rich and corporations to fund schools, programs, and teacher pay. It is also one of the most persuasive messages for Democrats in a regression analysis, second only to the anti-tax cut message calling to raise taxes to fund investments in priorities like education. Together, you will see below, they present a powerful midterm choice and produce improved Democratic margins and turnout.



To raise taxes or not to raise taxes, that is not a question

Critically, a winning tax cut message ends with a definitive commitment to restoring higher taxes for the rich and corporations to fund middle class investment priorities: “I want to be very clear: their huge tax giveaway is wrong and I will vote to put back higher taxes on the richest so we can invest in education and make health care more affordable.”

Just one-in-four voters say they prefer for the tax cut law to remain in place unchanged and there is strong support for restoring higher taxes. Specifically, when asked how to proceed on taxes, voters were most likely to call for raising taxes on the rich and corporations to fund investments.

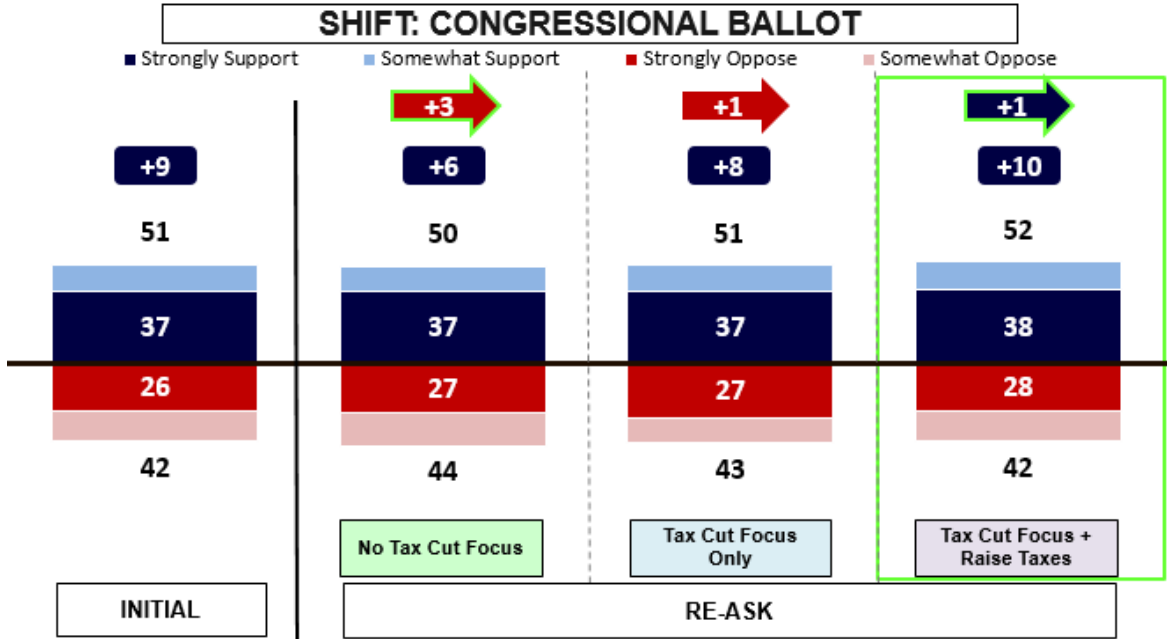


This is not just the most popular path forward, but part of a powerful electoral strategy. The large web-sample survey allowed a simulated campaign in which:

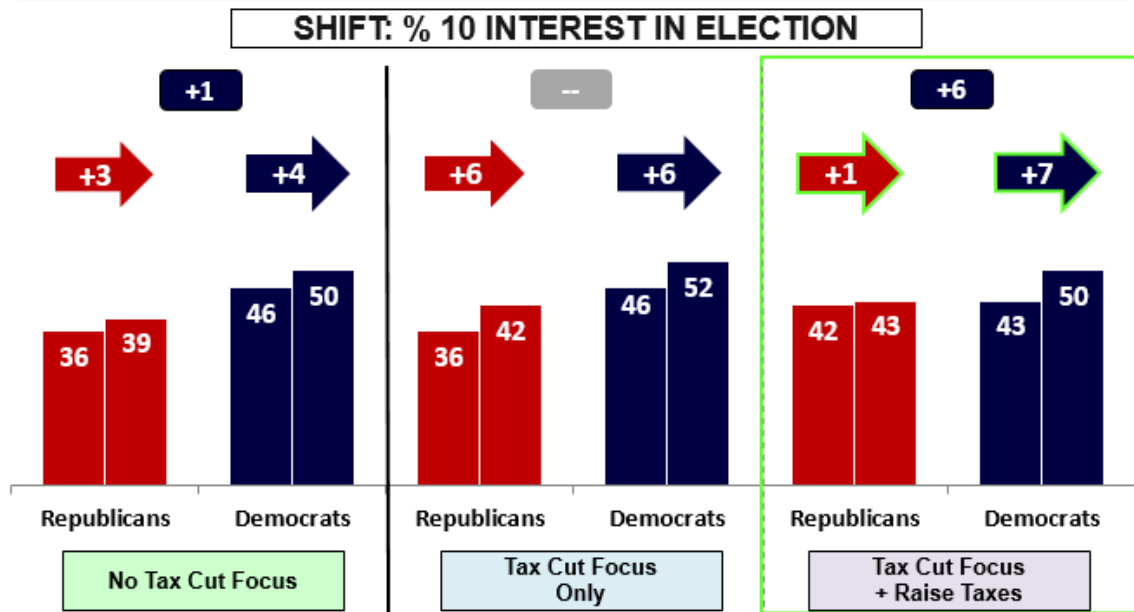
- One-quarter heard anti-tax cut and education messages that criticize politicians for supporting a tax cut instead of funding critical priorities and education.
- One-quarter heard anti-tax cut and education messages that criticize politicians for supporting a tax cut instead of funding critical priorities and education – *and* – called for higher taxes on the rich and corporations to fund these investments, including education.
- One-half heard a message about the economy working for the rich while the middle class struggles with rising costs, with only a brief reference to the tax cut’s benefits for the rich and corporations, and an education message that does not mention the tax cut.

The results of this experiment are strikingly clear: when voters hear messages dominated by criticism of the tax cut and demand tax increases on the rich and corporations to fund investments, the Democratic advantage in the congressional ballot and enthusiasm grows.

Thinking about the election for U.S. Congress in November, if the election for Congress were held today, who would you vote for? /How certain are you that you would vote for (CANDIDATE SELECTED) -- are you very certain, somewhat certain or not certain at all?



How interested are you in the elections in November for U.S. Congress and other state and local offices? Please rate your interest from 1 to 10, with 1 meaning that you have no interest in this election and 10 meaning that you are extremely interested.



When Democrats prioritize a critique of this “tax scam for the rich” and propose to raise taxes to fund investments – especially in retirement and education – they offer a powerful contrast to the economic status quo and the Republican politicians, making them capable of building the advantages needed for a wave election – a consolidated vote and differential enthusiasm.